Equality of Opportunity and Freedom from Discrimination

MHR Connections

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Human Rights Work Honoured

It has been a cold December but Winnipeg's Union Centre was full of warmth as over one hundred people gathered to celebrate International Human Rights Day and to honour the 2013 recipients of Manitoba's Human Rights awards.

Clare Simpson accepted the Commitment Award on behalf of the MLPD.

The event was hosted by the Canadian Human Rights Director Sherri Helgason and the Manitoba Association of Rights and Liberties Executive Director Choloe Chapple. Three Human rights Commitment Awards of Manitoba were given out as well as two Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Awards.

Also accepting for the MLPD, Jim Derksen remembered when disability rights were not covered in services provided to the public.

Betty Hopkins, a recipient of the Commitment Award, has volunteered full time for more than four decades working to address issues of inequality while promoting social justice. She is Chair of the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) Manitoba. During her acceptance, Ms Hopkins said that she needed another lifetime to do everything she wanted to get done. "If you don't celebrate diversity you are missing out, she said."

Another recipient of the Commitment Award is Professor of Family Studies at the University of Manitoba Dr. Joan Durrant. She is recognized for her work surrounding children's right to protection from violence and to discipline that respects their voices and dignity. Dr. Durrant was on a plane to Stockholm at the time of the celebrations but her son Jonah Durrant Olsen accepted the award on her behalf. Reading her acceptance, Jonah said, "The young man you see before you did not even exist when I began my work."

Betty Hopkins congratulated another recipient Megan Fultz for contributing so much at such a young age.

The Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities also received the 2013 Commitment Award. From its beginnings in

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The Rights Connection
by Yvonne Peters - Chairperson

Why do we celebrate human rights?

For many people in Canada, human rights are taken for granted. That is until someone tries to take them away. Many community groups, people with disabilities, women's organizations and fledgling gay straight alliance groups are more than aware that rights are hard fought for and it is often the voices of dedicated human rights advocates that play the biggest role. Sometimes it's a chorus, other times, a solo.

This month the world's attention was drawn to the philosophy of reconciliation and equality by the passing of one of the greatest human rights advocates of our generation, Nelson Mandela. Former Chairperson of the Commission Jerry Woods has said that he would love to have met Nelson Mandela because he was sure Mandela wanted to meet him. This is not a vain statement but rather the realization that we often say we would like to meet famous people who may not even care if they meet us. Nelson Mandela was different. Mr. Woods believes, and I agree, that Nelson Mandela wanted to meet people as much as we wanted to meet him.

With Mandela, one voice defied a government and many voices joined in. Celebrating human rights is a way to appreciate the greatness of those who stand up for equality.

Here in Manitoba we celebrate human rights by recognizing those who continue to look to a better future for everyone, whether it is the rights of children, persons with disabilities, women or the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, Transsexual (GLBTT) community. We have many local heroes and we celebrate their victories because with every step we become better people.

As young Megan Fultz who was one of the Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Award recipients said, "It is important for us to remember that half the battle is human rights; the other half is human responsibilities."

Celebrating human rights is our way of honouring those who have fought for both our rights and responsibilities while never forgetting that there are still voices out there to be heard.

Students William Pitch and Anne Binder accept award from Rebekah Enns (left).

Jonah Durrant Olsen accepts on behalf of his mother Dr. Joan Durrant.

Megan Fultz displays her Sybil Shack Award.

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1974 The Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities (MLPD) has had a profound impact on Manitoba. What better way to celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2014 than to honour it with the Human Rights Commitment Award of Manitoba. Accepting the award for the MLPD were Clare Simpson and Jim Derksen, both speaking eloquently on the success of past work and the challenges ahead.

The 2013 recipients of the Sybil Shack Youth Award were Megan Fultz and The Gray Academy of Jewish Education's Student Gay Straight alliance Group.

Ms Fultz who graduated with a degree in International Development Studies and Human Rights & Global Studies from The University of Winnipeg in June 2013 is currently serving as President of the University of Winnipeg Student Association. Ms Fultz praised the work of women like Betty Hopkins saying she was proud to be in her company as they continue to fight for an inclusive and just world. "It is important for us to remember that half the battle is human rights; the other half is human responsibility."

The evening ended with former Sybil Shack recipient Rebekah Enns congratulating the students of Gray Academy for starting a gay straight alliance group in their school. "I would like all schools to follow their example," Ms Enns said as she introduced Gray Academy co-presidents of the group Anne Binder and William Pitch who accepted the award on the group's behalf. Ms Binder explained how the volunteers came together over lunch hours to say, "I care. Let's talk about it."

William Pitch said that the school has seen a drop in the use of homophobic language in the school and everyone seems more open to talk.

Rebekah Enns started a Gay Straight Alliance at Westgate Mennonite Collegiate in Winnipeg and received the Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Award in 2011.

The Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Manitoba Human Rights Commission host the annual awards event every year.

Former Chairperson Jerry Woods honoured at opening of new legal clinic

Dianna Scarth said that during his 12 years as Vice Chairperson and Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission Jerry Woods epitomised his love of community and working with youth. (From left to right Sarah Lugtig, Jerry Woods and Dianna Scarth.)

The Legal Help Centre hosted an opening of a new outreach clinic and paid tribute to former Manitoba Human Rights Commission Chairperson Jerry Woods. The clinic received its funding by the Commission's former Executive Director Dianna Scarth and former Legal Counsel Sarah Lugtig as a gift in honour of Mr. Woods' retirement.

Saying that the clinic would change the lives of so many people, Mr. Woods also said that poverty is a great issue in our society.

The Centre's goal is to provide the community with more access to its services. The new outreach clinic is at the William Norrie Centre at 485 Selkirk Ave. They also have a monthly outreach clinic at the Siloam Mission.

The Legal Help Centre opened at Portage Place mall in 2011. It is a joint initiative of the legal profession and the Universities of Winnipeg and Manitoba. It is run by a community board that includes members of the legal profession and faculty and students from the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg.

Wishing you a safe holiday and a happy New Year.